

Water weight: How to lose it for good

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Water weight. It's the bane of dieters looking to lose pounds, causing bloating, puffiness and disappointment when stepping on a scale.

While a full 60% of your body is water, sometimes too much water is retained. That can make losing [weight](#) frustrating because it may seem like you aren't actually losing weight. Varying [water levels](#) can make a person's weight fluctuate by 2 to 4 pounds in just one day.

The amount of water your body contains is a function of your body's composition, sex and age, but eating can cause you to retain a few extra pounds of water. This extra water is fluid the kidneys would normally purge from the body.

"Most of our weight is water," said [Dr. Gabe Neal](#), a family medicine physician and clinical assistant professor at the Texas A&M College of Medicine. "It's the heaviest thing in our body besides our bones, and it is one of the first to go when you start losing weight."

So the question is, how do you lose water weight? The [MIDSS](#) (Measurement Instrument Database for the Social Sciences) has some advice.

Why do you retain water?

There are lots of reasons, including too much salt or carbs, menstrual hormones and dehydration.

"Water, when used efficiently, goes all over our bodies," Neal [said](#) recently. "We want it to go to our arteries, veins, tissue and cells throughout. However, when it goes to places between the cells and around the fat—an area called the 'third space'—it becomes a problem."

It takes about two days to lose one to three pounds of water weight. But how fast excess water leaves the body can depend on diet and [physical activity](#). The healthier your diet and the more physically active you are, the faster you can get rid of excess water. Water weight can also be a

sign of a chronic condition, such as heart or [kidney disease](#), which needs treatment. In women, changing menstrual cycles and hormones can also affect water weight, according to the MIDSS.

How to lose water weight

One way to prevent water retention is to reduce the amount of salt in your diet. This includes eating fewer processed foods that are often high in salt and using less salt at the dinner table. Processed foods like [instant noodles](#), cheese, soup mixes, pasta sauce, frozen meals and savory snacks use salt for flavor and as a preservative to extend shelf life, the MIDSS says.

"From a chemistry standpoint, water follows salt," Neal explained. "If your diet has a lot of sodium, then the water will follow and not go where it's supposed to."

Natural foods, such as vegetables, seeds and nuts, are low in salt, so choose these to keep water weight down.

Another tip is to stay hydrated by drinking water. That may seem counterintuitive, but water helps [kidney function](#) and aids in flushing excess water and salt from the body. When you are dehydrated your body retains extra water to keep dehydration at bay, according to the [National Academy of Sports Medicine](#) (NASM).

Another trick is to cut down on carbs, such as pasta and rice. Carbs cause the body to store glycogen molecules, which have 3 grams of water for every gram. Not eating carbs reduces glycogen molecules, thus reducing water weight, the MIDSS says.

Change your high-carb meals to protein-rich meals like eggs, soy and lean meats.

In addition to changing your diet, supplemental vitamin B6 and magnesium can help reduce water retention. These supplements help the kidneys flush excess salt and water. They can also help reduce bloating and swelling in the legs, the MIDSS says.

Exercise is another way to reduce water weight. By burning off glycogen energy, one hour of exercise can reduce water retention by 16 to 64 ounces. How much water you lose depends upon the temperature and what you're wearing. Physical activity that makes you sweat will quickly reduce water weight. Drinking water after a workout is vital to replacing lost fluids and avoiding dehydration, the MIDSS says.

Taking diuretics is another way to reduce water weight. These pills are usually prescribed by a doctor to lower blood pressure. They work by increasing urination, which removes [salt](#) and water, the NASM says.

Sleep is yet another important way to regulate the amount of water in your body. Sleep can make you thirsty and cause you to over-hydrate, which can cause your body to store more water. That can increase work for the kidneys, leading to kidney malfunction and more [water retention](#), the MIDSS says. A good night's sleep may also help regulate water levels.

Sitting for long periods can also let water build up in the body and lead to swelling of the arms and legs, according to the MIDSS. To prevent the accumulation of fluid, it's best to take breaks and go for a short walk.

"If you begin to notice swelling where there hasn't been any swelling, or notice a sharp increase in weight, you should talk to your [health care provider](#)," Neal said. "Also talk to your provider about how much water you're drinking in a day and if you think your water intake and retention are affecting your health."

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